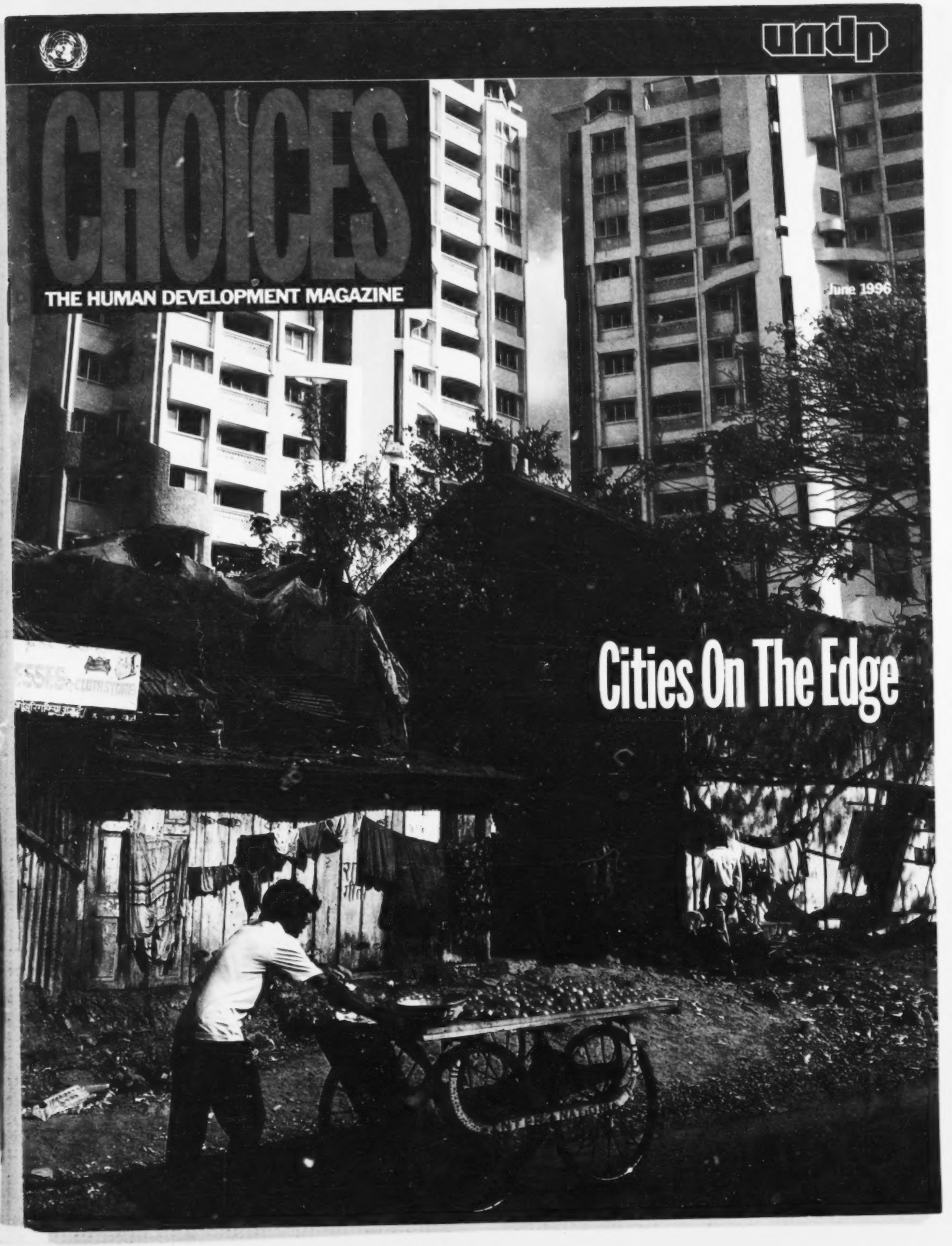

undp
CHOICES
THE HUMAN DEVELOPMENT MAGAZINE
June 1996
Cities On The Edge

IN CHIEF

FROM THE EDITOR

Visiting Nepal.

For as long as she can remember, Lenore Cola had wanted to be a nurse.

After completing high school in New York City, she pursued her dream and went on to study nursing. But after a year, her family could no longer afford the tuition, and she was forced to drop out. Disappointed but not discouraged, Lenore moved to New Orleans, Louisiana, where she found employment as a nursing assistant, a job she held for the next seven years.

Lenore returned to New York City. But despite a long job search, she was unable to find work in her field or even any job that would enable her to care for herself and her three children. Then the unthinkable happened. She and her children became homeless. For four years they moved from one place to another, sometimes staying in shelters, other times sleeping in the subway.

To be homeless in New York City — or any major city in the industrialized world — is to fall off the bottom of the social ladder. The homeless eke out an existence in an underworld of deprivation, often characterized by drugs and violence.

Lenore is one of those who managed to climb out of that world. She owes her escape to a lucky encounter with an organization called the Fourth World Movement. One of its programmes was a library for homeless children in the neighbourhood of Harlem. Lenore's children took advantage of it, and soon numbered among its model students. She herself became a volunteer with the Fourth World Movement, which helped her find a new home and tap into social services to pay for it.

From that base, Lenore is putting her life back together. She is still in need of a job, but at least she has a roof over her head and hope for a more stable life.

Earlier this year, UNDP invited Lenore Cola to the United Nations to help launch the International Year for the Eradication of Poverty. She spoke of the need to help individuals and families free themselves from the extreme aspects of poverty, of their need to live in dignity and to take an active part in the development of their communities and their nations.

These concerns were echoed by UNDP Administrator James Gustave Speth. "One hundred and fifty years ago, the world launched a crusade against slavery," he said. "Today we must launch a world crusade against mass poverty."

Lenore's story came to mind a few weeks later while I was accompanying Mr. Speth on a tour of Arab Gulf states. At the top of his agenda in meetings with governmental and non-governmental leaders was the need to combat poverty. The Gulf region, like New York City, is not a part of the world one normally associates with poverty. But what we are coming to realize is that pockets of deprivation exist everywhere — as does the drive to overcome it.

Last year I travelled with a group of journalists to China and Nepal to see first-hand how people, especially women, are working to improve their lives and climb out of poverty. In Nepal, we met Sharada Rijal. Once turned down for a loan of only US$70, she nonetheless was able to develop a thriving business making hats, with supplier offers today worth $10,000. Sharada is known as the "cap lady of Kathmandu." Other budding women entrepreneurs are hurrying to sign up for business training courses with the UNDP-backed non-governmental group, the Women Entrepreneurs Association of Nepal.

The commemoration of 1996 as the International Year for the Eradication of Poverty is an opportunity for all of us to highlight the complex and multidimensional nature of this worldwide scourge, as well as to pay tribute to exceptional individuals like Sharada Rijal and Lenore Cola. In subsequent issues of *Choices* we will report on a crusade against poverty that is being undertaken through the 136 country offices of UNDP. In particular, during the week of 17 October, governments, institutions, communities and individuals will join forces to call attention to the worldwide problems of poverty and to alert us to opportunities to work for poverty's eradication in our own communities and nations.

I am particularly pleased to introduce the newly designed *Choices*, which is being issued in time for the Second UN Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II) in Istanbul. In it, we explore aspects of that staggering phenomenon called urbanization and look at ways in which the urban poor are working together with local authorities, voluntary groups and the business community to shape a better future. I look forward to your feedback and to a creative exchange of ideas.

Djibril Diallo

Editor in Chief
Djibril Diallo

Editor
Lois Jensen

Associate Editor
Richard Kollodge

Art Direction and Design
Emerson, Wajdowicz Studios

Contributing Editors
Mary Lynn Hanley
Peter Gall

Contributors
François Coutu
Dirk Drijbooms
Jean Fabre
Cherie Hart
Tony Hughes
Sid Kane
Hyacinth Morgan
Sylvana Nzirorera
Trygve Olfartues
Hilda Paqui
Iruthayanathan Rajeswary

Translation Manager
Elizabeth Scott Andrews

Editorial/Production Assistant
Jennifer Prince

Administration
Freweini Abebe
Bhagrathi Savage

Circulation
Nora Perez
Alexandra Bodanza

Distribution
Welde Hailemelekot
Alula Chelle

Advisers
Dianne Abbott
Sharon Capeling-Alakija
Mervin Aubespin
Sandy Close
Alan Doss
Mahbub ul Haq
Nadia Hijab
Richard Jolly
Inge Kaul
Geoffrey Lean
Ruben Mendez
William Vendley
Anders Wijkman

CHOICES is published four times a year by the Division of Public Affairs, United Nations Development Programme, One United Nations Plaza, New York, New York 10017, USA. Tel: (212) 906-5315, Fax: (212) 906-5364.

The articles in this magazine do not necessarily reflect the official views or policies of the United Nations Development Programme, nor do the boundaries and names shown on maps imply official endorsement by the United Nations. Articles may be freely reproduced as long as credit is given and tear sheets are provided to the editor. CHOICES is available in English, French and Spanish.

Printed by Hoechstetter Printing Co. on chlorine-free recycled paper with vegetable inks and produced by means of environmentally compatible technology.

Cover photo of Bombay, India by O. Sakamaki/JB Pictur

CHOICES
THE HUMAN DEVELOPMENT MAGAZINE

Volume 5 Number 1

VIEWPOINTS

Africa is Saving Itself 4
By Franz Schurmann

Pursuing Progress and Losing Ladakh 10
By Helena Norberg-Hodge

SPECIAL FEATURE

Gender and Development:
Glimpses from Nepal 14

DEVELOPMENT WORKS

Cities on the Brink Try New Tactics 18
By Kristin Helmore

How to Build a Million Homes.
And That's the Easy Part. 22
By David Hecht

NOTEBOOK

24
Green Cities
Legendary Cities
Violence-Free Cities
Another Africa Initiative?
The Forgotten War in Laos
Pig Power
Newsmaker

MATTERS OF FACT

28

A publication of the United Nations Development Programme

AFRICA IS SAVING ITSELF

By Franz Schurmann

Is Africa hopeless? Or is it drawing on uniquely African strengths to save itself and, in the process, redefining Western ideas about development? In the following essay, Franz Schurmann explores the power of "social capital" in Africa, both as a force for survival in turbulent times as well as for positive change.

For close to a decade, political observers throughout the West have been predicting Africa's demise. "Africa — the basket case of the planet...a vast continent in free fall," wrote *Time*'s Lance Morrow in September 1992. In a widely circulated *Atlantic* article in April 1994, author Richard Kaplan predicted Africa's rapid descent into anarchy. Last September, a Western journalist at a UN conference in Zimbabwe described the pervasive view of Africa as "so far behind the rest of the developing world that it is wrapped in its own cocoon of despair."

Yet at the same time, the World Bank is predicting an economic growth rate of 4.2 per cent for sub-Saharan Africa, the institution's highest projection in recent decades. And in the eyes of many risk-minded stockbrokers, Africa is a continent poised for dramatic growth. "Optimists...have been pointing to markets in Africa, south of the Sahara, as beacons of hope amid all the gloom," noted *Financial Times* analyst Joel Kibazo in January 1995. Last June, *Le Monde Diplomatique* correspondent Michel Galy noted that in Guinea, one of Africa's poorest countries, foreign investment is on the rise. "...Air France and Aeroports de Paris are back in aviation, Bollore in transportation, France Telephone in communications, Accor in hotels, Bouygues in water and public works, Total and Elf in petrol...." *Financial Times* analyst Miles Morland listed five African countries among his "good bets" for foreign investors.

Which is the more accurate picture? Clearly, even if Africa's "dramatic growth" is considered by some to be a new economic colonialism supplanting the old political one, it is still significant. Growth cannot survive in a morass of chaos. If African countries are accomplishing no more than doing the bidding of foreign economic giants, they still need to be functioning states — with governments overwhelmingly led and staffed by Africans. Even more importantly, African states manage to attract foreign investment only when they are at peace.

Order from chaos

Peace is perhaps the single most evident change to emerge in sub-Saharan Africa by the end of 1995. Consider for example, how the bloody wars that recently raged in Angola, Chad, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Mozambique and Uganda have virtually ended. The much-feared civil war in South Africa didn't happen. Namibia, Zambia and Zimbabwe have been at peace for some years now.

Conflict still survives on the continent, but not to the extent of recent years. And it may be fair to say that for all Africa's penchant for chaotic wars, it also has deep-rooted gifts for finding peace among its contending peoples.

A number of African scholars now believe African traditions are coming into play as major forces for stability and positive change. Ali Mazrui of the State University of New York at Binghamton speaks of these forces as "the ancestors." In the book *Uganda Now*, Mazrui writes, "I am not unhappy that the ancestors are fighting back, that they are saying: 'Your pact of the post-colonial era is inappropriate....' We pronounce a curse on all your post-colonial arrangements until a new compact of African authenticity is devised."

A sign of this "new compact of African authenticity" may now be evident in Somalia. According to Elmi Duale, World Health Organization representative in Asmara, the far-flung but culturally unified Somalis were traditionally governed not by kings but by clan leaders. This acephalous governance, as he calls it, was known as "the tree of authority." But a century of misrule by colonials and dictators weakened the tree. Now it is growing back and can be reckoned as the chief force moving the Somali people toward peace. As an elder of one of the Somali clans told journalists last September, "Power is still wielded through clans in which elders play a special role in a kind of decentralized democracy. Somali society is evolving around chiefs. Even the warlords are relying on the chiefs...."

The warlords of Africa are not traditional but rather a phenomenon of modernity.

Overcoming adversity: After walking for ten days with her son, a Sudanese refugee finds safe haven in Ethiopia. (far right) ▶

They are fighting for power in a Western-type state with its armies, police, bureaucracies, control over economic institutions and, most important, access to Western wealth. Yet while traditional political leaders — like elders or chiefs — retain authority, they lack the modern power of the warlords. For the peace process now spreading over Africa to last, traditional authority and modern power will have to find a *modus vivendi* — and that means developing political systems that rest on foundations much stronger than the Western-style states handed down by the departing colonials.

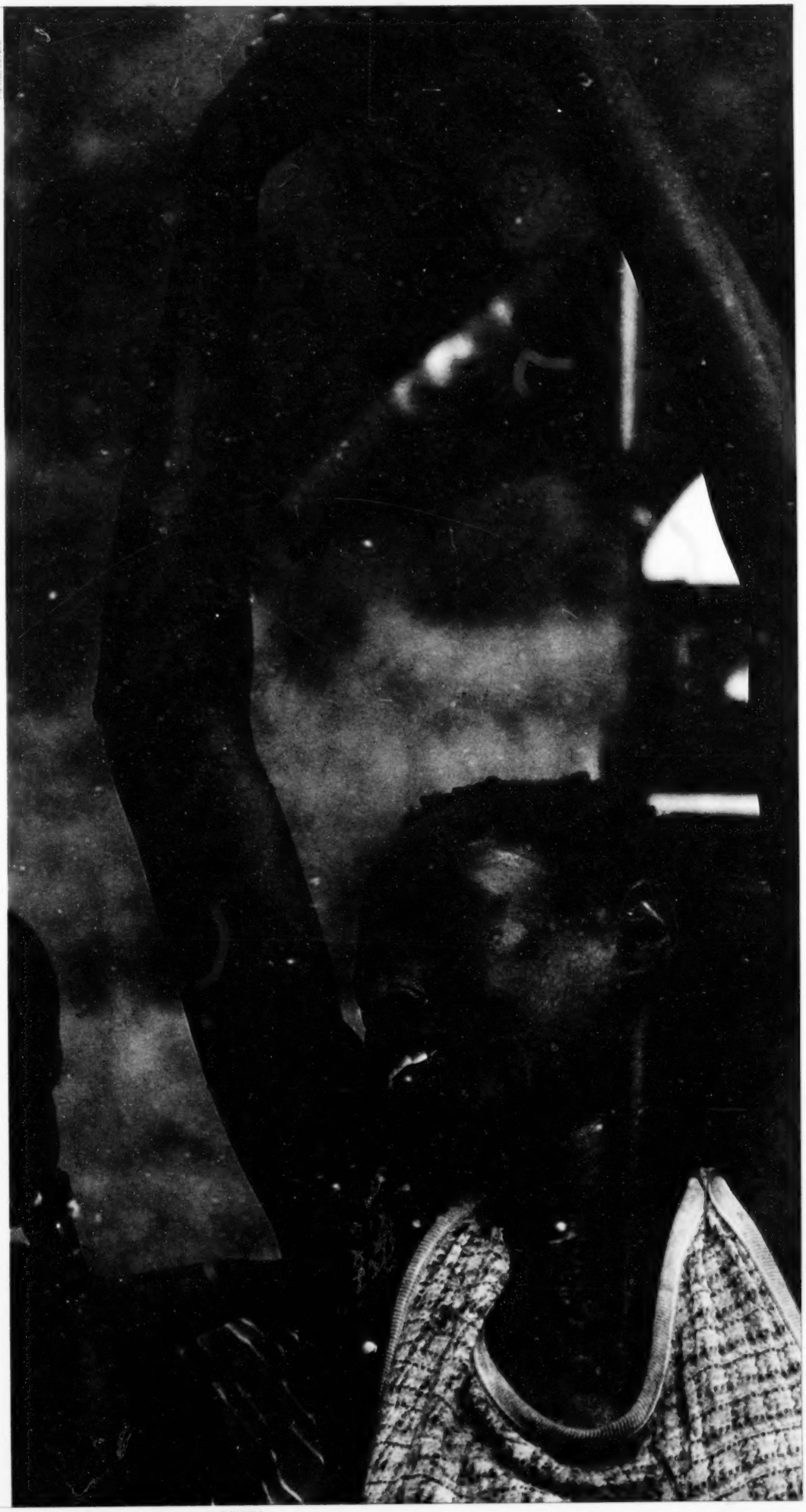
Some Africans view their chiefs as a symbol of backwardness and wish they would vanish. But as Western-style states in Africa have failed to perform all that well, other Africans wonder whether some of the better features of the traditional chieftainships and the modern state can be combined. The modern state can, in principle, efficiently organize large tracts of territory and be democratic, but it is separated from the people by layers of bureaucracy. On the other hand, African chiefs traditionally lived right in the midst of their peoples. The historical African antipathy to overarching state power arose from a deep belief that whoever ruled, whether well or badly, had to do so in close proximity to the ruled.

For all Africa's penchant for chaotic wars, it also has deep-rooted gifts for finding peace among its contending peoples.

In traditional Africa, a distinction between state and society would have made no sense. What existed was a sort of community, and everybody — from the chief exercising the greatest authority to those with the least — were part of the communal whole. When the colonial powers entered Africa they distanced themselves from the community by establishing alien Europeans as rulers, centralizing power in colonial capitals. Later, when Africans took over, this distance remained.

Social foundations

Much has been made of the divisive and often bloody effects of "tribalism." As in the former Yugoslavia, so too in Africa,



PETROCENKO

attachment to one's own people has all too often been accompanied by murderous hatred of "the others." Recent clashes between Hutus and Tutsis, for example, have been horrific. But the conflicts have overshadowed a solidarity within each community. Tribes are strong ethnic communities based on equally strong sub-communities — lineages, clans, families. There are plenty of signs that, along with tribes, Africa's social structures have survived the chaos, not only in the villages of this still largely rural continent but in cities as well — even inside the tattered tents of the continent's many refugee camps.

Correspondent Michel Galy attributed the survival of Guinea, for example, to "the strength and cohesion of the country's village communities, despite the run-down state." As an example, he cited loans that are "extended to villages under conditions of collective responsibility and have high repayment rates."

ROBERT DEMENDONCA

Survival factors: Markets, like this one in Maputo, Mozambique, have long been a key feature of African life. ▶

All of the wars in Africa have been over state power — power in the Western-type states. And while the Western media have focused on the battered and mutilated victims of these wars, they have largely ignored the remarkable revival capabilities of traditional African society. It is from these social structures that Africa is being reborn — a phenomenon all but lost to Western eyes, now too glazed over with compassion fatigue to see it.

Those who do see it are a small but growing number of investment experts. For them, the message is clear: Africa is rich, not just in resources, but in people. If the continent's traditional social stability survives and peace spreads, a lot of money can be made there. That is also the tacit message coming from the similarly growing migration of business people to the continent.

A resilient continent

There are more and more signs that Africans are learning some valuable lessons from their own remarkable survival powers, and beginning to follow their own and different paths.

Africans have three strong survival factors rooted in their history: family, villages and markets. The African family is a large one, with its nuclear component easily meshing into larger clans and even larger ethnic groups, commonly called "tribes." Generally the ethnic group will have a characteristic language or dialect. Social, economic and political cooperation goes on within the group.

Sub-Saharan Africa is a predominantly agricultural region with large numbers of herders. The village is the characteristic habitation of the agriculturalists, and ties remain strong to the villages. When things go wrong in towns and cities, Africans often go back to their village.

Long before the colonials came, African agriculturalists had already moved out of subsistence farming. Ancient trade routes criss-cross the entire continent, and markets have long been a key feature of African life. Today markets, mostly small but lively, can be found all over the continent. Like markets elsewhere they link local villages to a larger socio-economic sphere. Africans have long been multilingual, a sign of contact with external worlds.

Africans have three strong survival factors rooted in their history: family, villages and markets.

Few observers would deny that these traditional factors aid Africans' survival, but they might question their contribution to development.

The wrong model

The word "development" has become shorthand for "modernization and industrialization." For many people, these three words telescope into a single word — "Westernization." Thus development = Westernization. Westernization means creating political-economic-social complexes essentially similar to those that exist in "developed" regions like Western Europe, East Asia and the United States. In Westernized countries, some argue, democratic political systems have the best chance of delivering domestic peace, market economies with regulation by democratic government have a better chance of producing wealth, and social orders marked by individual freedoms and civil rights have the best chance of bringing about a stable social order. If countries significantly meet these standards, they are "developed." If not, they are "developing."

Africa, by these standards ranks as one of the most undeveloped regions of the world. "Estimated per capita incomes are falling by one per cent per annum for a region that has the greatest amount of conflict and the largest number of failed states in the world," a recent North-South conference reported.

But the development concept itself has been undergoing changes and challenges even in the West. The World Bank now includes environmental indicators in its list of what constitutes development. Amarta Sen of Harvard University has suggested longevity as a measure of development. Francis Fukuyama notes the importance of a key social element — he calls it trust — in certain highly developed societies, notably Japan and Germany.

AFRICA IS SAVING ITSELF

As the discussion about what constitutes development expands, one point is clear: the notion that development and Westernization are identical has to be abandoned. That leaves only one definition of development that presumably everyone can agree on: a common well-being. This implies that whatever acts are carried out in a country that are taken to scale and significantly increase well-being must be considered acts of development. But even with this new criterion, Africa does not come out well. But it certainly comes out better than if its current quality of life were measured according to its degree of Westernization.

Indeed, one of Africa's greatest "developmental" resources is its social structure. Families, lineages and tribes remain strong social units all over sub-Saharan Africa. Similarly markets — mostly small and monetized — function all over the continent. And most of the wealth exchanged at these markets comes from land and animals. The operation of this triad would be impossible without solid yet flexible social structures. The families generate social stability, the villages (through land and animals) produce wealth, and the markets bring in money. And while money in the form of cash is used to pay for things needed in everyday life, some is set aside for savings (assets) and some for investment capital.

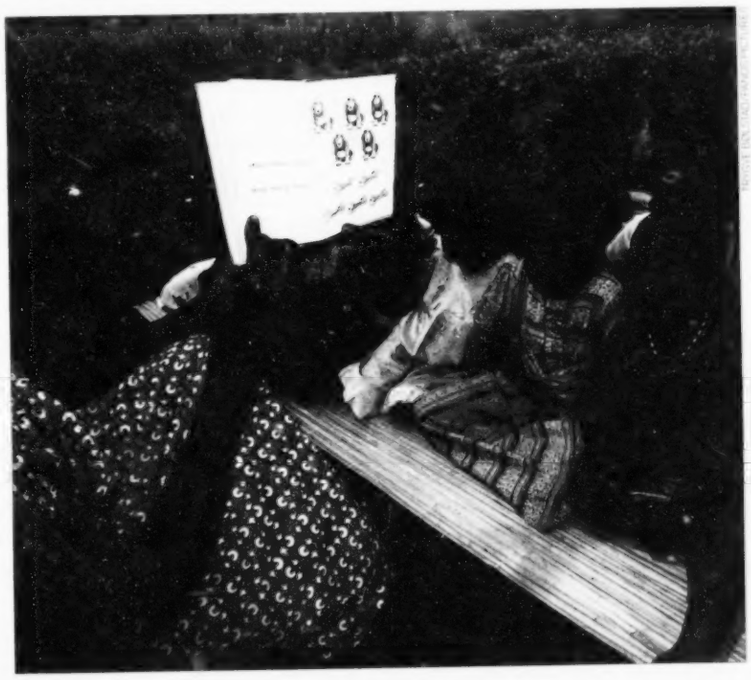
Even the most rural Africans do not operate through subsistence economies any longer. They realize that they cannot get what they need and want without hard work, and without saving. And their savings go for two main ends: to educate their children and to make investments that will yield future returns.

The large social unit, rather than being a drag on capital as early Western observers claimed, has become a key element in capital accumulation. Individuals contribute to the common savings if a family or communal goal is to be met. This is the way East Asians and

The development concept itself has been undergoing changes and challenges even in the West.

Indians have moved ahead economically, and it is the way Africans are moving ahead as well.

Like Asians, Africans find well-being in social units — a socio-cultural fact. They also find security — a communal or political fact. And now they are discovering the development potential of the social unity — an economic and developmental fact. When the social-cultural, the political and the economic work together, well-being is advanced. And if this local triad becomes true at a larger level, one can say that a country is well on the way to full development.



◀ **"An obsession with education": Ugandan schoolchildren.**

Uganda leads the way

Africa is a highly diverse place, but one country, Uganda, currently enjoying international praise for its recent economic performance, could be considered a harbinger of what could come about within the next ten years throughout sub-Saharan Africa.

A country of 17 million people, Uganda has undergone horrors similar to those of other African countries. The name Idi Amin still evokes shudders all over the world, though the six years of internal war subsequent to his fall cost far more human lives than died under his brutal regime. Another problem is Uganda's HIV infection rate — one of the highest in the world.

Yet in 1994 Uganda achieved a ten per cent economic growth rate, according to the International Monetary Fund. Food is abundant, the currency is stable and land prices are rising everywhere, a sign of vibrant growth.

The contradiction between the evident energy and well-being among ordinary people and the high death rate from AIDS is jarring. Yet there is a spiritual strength among Ugandans that allows them to cope with so much death around them. That spirituality has its roots in the strength of the villages where, significantly, the AIDS infection rate is far lower than in the towns.

One of the best indicators of how social structures contribute to Uganda's survival is the fate of its orphans. While official figures put their number at some 1.3 million, few if any homeless children are seen on urban streets. Officials at the Ugandan Women's Effort to Save the Orphans attribute the low figure to the country's strong clan structure. Most homeless children are placed with relatives in rural areas who have land and can grow food, and rely on the clan to provide school fees.

The families, villages and markets of Uganda are the primary fuel energizing the country's recent high growth rate. Uganda has little industrialization — 80 per cent of its population works in agriculture. Kampala, a capital city of close to one million people, has neither a booming downtown nor an outer circle of slums. In contrast to the urban sprawl of cities in other parts of the world, it is more a case of village and city melding with each other. Some 36 per cent of city land is under cultivation and most of the poultry the city consumes comes from within city limits.

Where once the government, seeking to emulate Western-style industrialization, discouraged urban farming, today it seems to recognize that urban agriculture is part of a seamless nationwide fabric that is contributing to Uganda's impressive recovery and stability.

Most people in Uganda don't live and work in one place. Rather, there is a back-and-forth between village and city. The village is where Ugandans' traditional social structures and spirituality are rooted. The city is their Western side, which culturally now is as deep as their village side. In fact, the obsession with education is directly linked to Westernization, as is the almost universal knowledge of English. At the same time, the fact that most people can speak four or five languages illustrates Ugandan's deep traditions of markets.

Except for some large tea plantations in the western part of the country owned mainly by Indian families, agriculture takes place primarily on small and scattered plots owned by African families. In Kampala, too, most businesses are small and almost entirely owned by Africans. Larger foreign investment exists, but is limited. In sum, Uganda's recent achievements have just about all been secured by its own efforts. As a result, neither foreign aid directives nor assistance but the power of African traditions — especially of family, markets and village — offered real resources for both survival and development.

Rethinking aid

Uganda's recent achievements have begun to inspire some rethinking on the part of the international development community. More aid, for example, is now focusing on micro-enterprises. In Uganda itself, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) is assisting several such micro-enterprises, mostly in rural areas. But it is basically the family-village-market triad that is pushing their development along. To the extent foreign aid appears successful, it is because the developmental impulse has come from below, with foreign donors willing to act as facilitators rather than planners. Where the opposite is true, long-term success appears questionable.

One of the most promising developmental areas in Africa, where push from below is paired with aid from above, is in the area of credit and savings. Uganda has a tradition of rural credit going back many decades. And recently some of the 1,000-plus non-governmental organizations (NGOs) operating in the country are going into rural credit, savings and education.

To the extent foreign aid appears successful, it is because the developmental impulse has come from below, with foreign donors willing to act as facilitators rather than planners.

One such NGO is the Foundation for Credit and Community Assistance (FOCCAS), which received a US$316,000 grant from UNDP to help reduce poverty and prevent HIV/AIDS in eastern and northern Uganda. FOCCAS has launched a credit and education project that operates through families in the villages, and targets recipients from commercial, industrial and agricultural sectors.

Building from the bottom up: Karamojong women in northeastern Uganda. ▶

AFRICA IS SAVING ITSELF

Ever since the first Grameen Bank experiment in Bangladesh almost two decades ago, rural credit and savings projects have scored significant success in Asia, Latin America and Africa. The repayment rates have been high because women, who in many parts of the world have become the main forces behind community development, know that repayment is a *sine-qua-non* for obtaining future capital.

Wherever Grameen-type projects have succeeded it is because women have used their cultural legacies of family, village and markets to make the credit work as social capital.

A new kind of revolution

To make sure that this strong push from the bottom continues, Uganda needs a lot of help at its middle and top. At the middle, it needs infrastructure — decent roads, hospitals, schools and clinics, as well as better education in technology, management, social work. This requires external aid and assistance. At the top, Uganda, like other African nations, requires much more than generous handouts. What it really needs are acts of sincere respect from the great economic powers. With the rising surge from the bottom and significant improvement in infrastructure, coupled with acceptance into the higher rungs of the world status ladder, much of sub-Saharan Africa is likely to be characterized by well functioning states not far into the next century.

More and more Africans now believe that the entire continent is in a systemic political transition in which the Westernized state, handed over to Africans intact when they were granted independence, has to be integrated with African political traditions. By assuming there are no alternatives to the Western-type state, all the talk about democracy — much of it by Africans themselves — obscures this transition. One country where such a transition has been going on for some time is Tanzania. As a result, it is evolving a new compact of African authenticity that has to be recognized as a major factor in its having escaped the horrific violence of so many of its African neighbours.

The current rush toward peace in Africa may represent an acceleration of this integration process. Enemies are being forced to deal with each other by word rather than by gun. It is very much an African tradition to talk rather than kill, and that tradition may be returning. What could eventually emerge in sub-Saharan Africa is a kind of three-tiered socio-political pattern. At a country's political top and its social bottom, the action and the players will be predominantly African. In the middle, both Africans and Westerners will play prominent roles — but this time on equal levels.

In the eyes of the world — prejudiced by the Western media — Africa's image is still one of poor house and killing field. Yet in the years to come, Africans may help the world resolve one of its most monumental dilemmas — how to survive if Western-style modernization and industrialization squeeze most of us and our descendants into immense mega-cities. Almost half the world's peoples already live in cities, and unaltered trends will mean that nearly two-thirds will be urban by 2025.

Africa, perhaps with Uganda in the lead, is showing a new path, a kind of marriage between city and village through which both move ahead and become interdependent. A working social economy is emerging in Uganda impelled by both modern and traditional factors on the foundation of which an effective political superstructure can rest. That is easily conceivable as a model for other still heavily rural countries. But Uganda can also offer lessons to highly developed countries where social structures are so ravaged that they are affecting economic growth, political stability and even longer-term survival.

History offers several examples of great empires crumbling from ravaged social foundations. Africa could become known as the continent that saved itself from below. ■

Franz Schurmann is an editor at Pacific News Service, which he co-founded, and a professor emeritus of sociology and history at the University of California at Berkeley. He is the author of several books on China and world politics, and is working on a new book on social capital.

PURSUING PROGRESS AND LOSING

Over two decades, Helena Norberg-Hodge witnessed the onslaught of modernization on communities in Ladakh, an area in northern India on the Tibetan Plateau. In the following essay, she questions the inevitability of urbanization and other trends leading to a "monoculture" world, and proposes a radical change in direction.

When I first came to Leh in 1975, it was a lovely town. It had only two paved streets, and a motor vehicle was a rare sight. Cows were the most likely cause of congestion. The air was crystal clear, so clear that the snow peaks on the far side of the valley, 30 kilometres away, seemed close enough to touch. Five minutes' walk in every direction from the town centre were barley fields, dotted with large farmhouses. Though it was a district capital of 5,000 people, Leh had the feeling of a village; everyone knew and greeted each other.

For the last two decades I have watched this town turn into an urban sprawl. Soulless, cell-like "housing colonies" have eaten into the green fields and spread into the dusty desert, punctuated not by trees but by electricity poles. Flaking paint, rusting metal, broken glass and discarded plastic rubbish are now part of the scenery. Billboards advertise cigarettes and powdered milk.

For centuries, Leh was rooted in a sustainable economy. It was part of a virtually cashless society where everyone seemed to have enough — enough to eat, enough leisure time, beautiful possessions, abundant energy, a wealth of social connections and irrepressible *joie de vivre*. The Ladakhi were rich in skills that enabled them to live comfortably in a dry, fierce mountain landscape, to grow barley at 3,600 metres and manage yaks and other animals at even higher elevations. People knew how to build houses with their own hands from materials of their immediate surroundings. While some people made a living from trade with the outside world, most economic activity was based on local resources.

But the twin forces of Western-style development and globalization are transforming Leh into a centre with very different economic foundations. The building of a road connecting the town with the outside world has hooked Ladakh up to the global economy, with economic activity concentrated in the

capital. All the elements of modern living have been introduced there: electricity, paid employment, government offices, the district's only gas station, hospital and movie theatre, the better schools, two banks, even a football stadium. Development in Ladakh, as elsewhere, has worked like a whirlpool, pulling people relentlessly into the centre. The population of Leh has more than doubled, and the rural population has diminished as young people move to the city in search of education and jobs.

In Leh these days, people produce almost nothing for themselves: food, clothing and building materials all have to be transported into town by a constant caravan of polluting trucks, in some cases from as far away as the South of India. Even water has to be trucked in, often at the expense of the surrounding countryside, where essential irrigation systems are being depleted.

The unrelenting sweep of modernization and globalization that is fueling the growth of cities and breaking down the core of rural communities in Ladakh is affecting cultures and communities everywhere. Demographic experts lead us to believe that nearly two-thirds of the world's population will be urban by the year 2025, as if it were some kind of natural evolutionary progression. Such assumptions are exceedingly dangerous, for they imply that it is a process completely beyond anyone's control.

For centuries, Leh was rooted in a sustainable economy. It was part of a virtually cashless society where everyone seemed to have enough.

Today's modern megalopolises remain largely unexamined and unquestioned, and are qualitatively distinct from what we know of past cities. What is too easily forgotten is that the majority of the world's people today, particularly in Asia and Africa, *are still on the land*. Ignoring them — speaking as if people are urbanized as part of the human condition — is a dangerous misconception, one that is helping to fuel the process of urbanization itself.

Before this occurs, we owe it to ourselves and to future generations to examine the forces that support globalization and urbanization — in all their complexity — and begin to shift our direction away from global dependence and toward stronger communities and local economies.

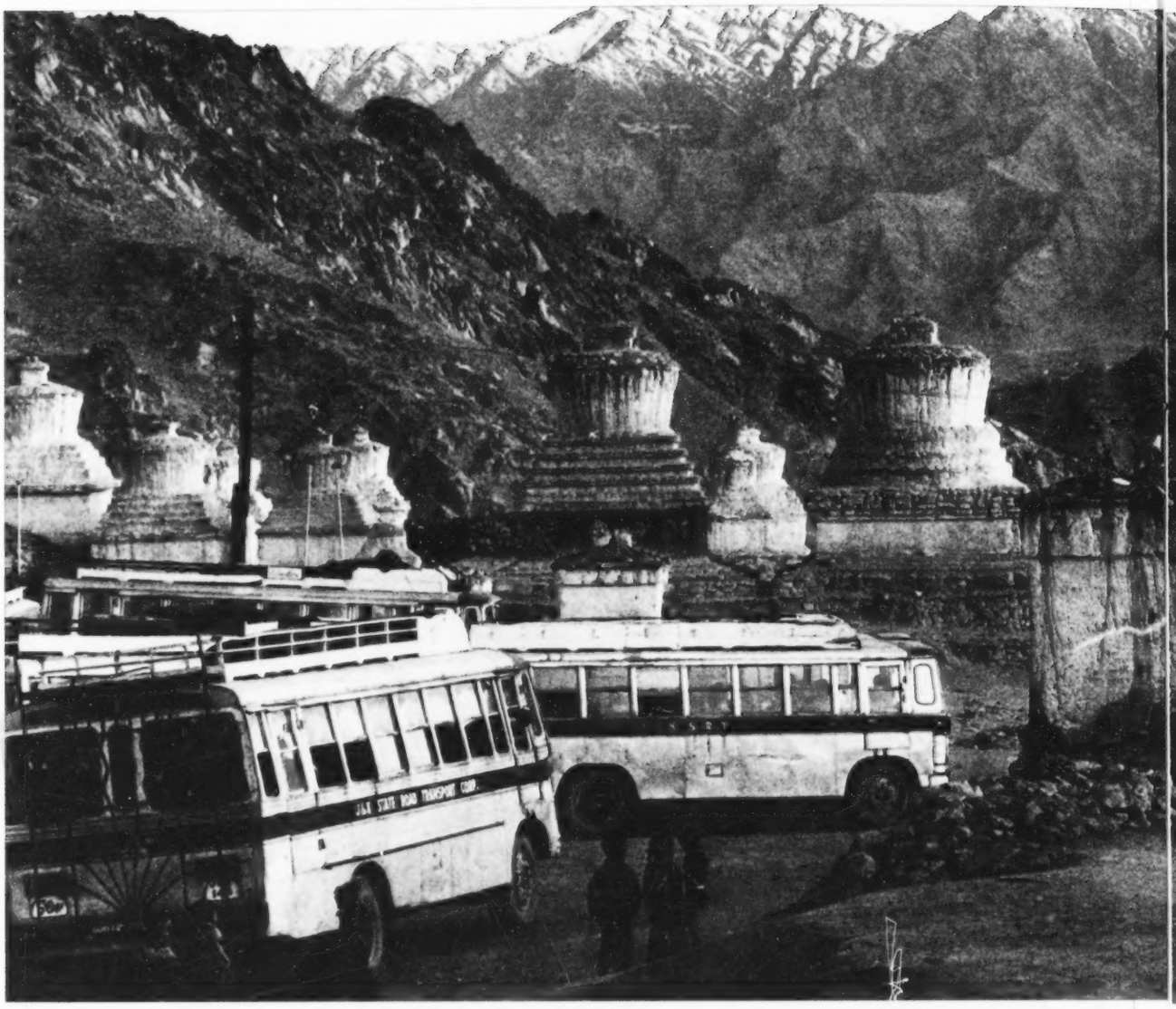
The trend toward centralizing resources in large urban areas is alarming for many reasons. First, the shift of economic and political power from rural areas has meant a concomitant loss of self-respect among rural populations. In small communities today, people are often living on the periphery, while power — and even

PHOTO: HELENA NORBERG-HODGE

◀ **A dying profession? Managing goats and other animals in Ladakh.**

LADAKH

By Helena Norberg-Hodge



An ancient culture meets the modern world: The bus station in Ladakh. ▶

what we call "culture" — is centralized somewhere else. The psychological damage of not being recognized, seen or valued for one's uniqueness is immense. And the few remaining cultures that have, over millennia, developed the traditional wisdom we need at this time of planetary crisis are dying quick deaths.

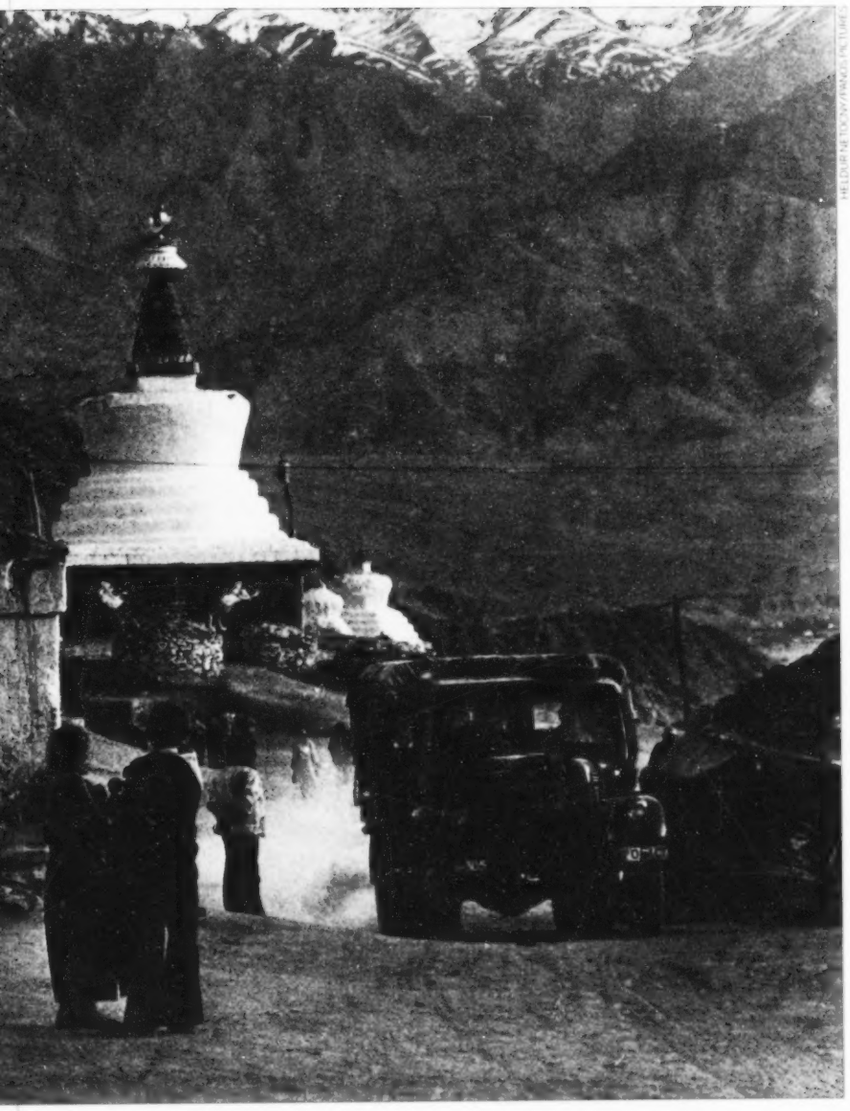
Second, urban centres around the world are extremely resource-intensive. The large-scale, centralized systems they require are almost always more stressful to the environment than small-scale, diversified, locally-adapted production. Food and water, building materials and energy must all be transported great distances via vast energy-consuming infrastructures; their concentrated wastes must be hauled away again in trucks and barges, or incinerated at great cost to the environment. In cities' identical glass and steel towers with windows that never open, even air to breathe must be provided by fans and pumps, driven by non-renewable energy. From the most affluent sections of Paris to the slums of Calcutta, urban populations depend on transport for their food, so that every kilogram consumed is accompanied by several kilograms of petroleum consumption, as well as significant amounts of pollution and waste.

While there is growing recognition of the destructive effects of economic globalization, the conviction that the solutions lie with *localizing* economic activity is far less widespread. In the North, where we have mostly been separated from the land and from each other, we have large steps to take.

Still, in regions that are highly urbanized, it is possible to nurture a new connection to place. By reweaving the fabric of small communities within large cities, and by redirecting economic activity toward surrounding natural resources, cities can regain their regional character, become more "livable" and less burdensome on our environment. Our task will be made easier if we support our remaining rural communities and small farmers: they are key to rebuilding a healthy agricultural base for stronger, more localized economies.

The grassroots actions that are springing up around the world in reaction to globalization are inspiring: "buy-local" campaigns that help local businesses survive even when pitted against heavily subsidized corporate competitors; farmers' markets, which in New York City alone

The few remaining cultures that have developed the traditional wisdom we need at this time of planetary crisis are dying quick deaths.



HELEN NORBERG-HODGE/ANCIENT FUTURES

add several million dollars annually to the income of farmers in nearby counties; "eco-villages" that rely on renewable energy and are seeking to develop more cooperative local economies; and Local Exchange Trading Systems, where people who were once "unemployed" and therefore "useless" are bartering services and becoming valued for their knowledge and skills.

Yet for these local initiatives to succeed on a wide scale, they need to be accompanied by a thorough rethinking of public spending and policy changes at the national and international levels. How, for example, can grassroots participatory democracy be strengthened unless limits are placed on the political power of huge corporations? How can local support alone enable small producers and locally owned shops to flourish if corporate welfare and "free trade" policies heavily promote the interests of large-scale producers and marketers? How can we return to a local context in education if monocultural media images continue to bombard children in every corner of the planet? How can efforts to promote the use of locally-available renewable energy resources compete against massive subsidies for huge dams and nuclear power plants?

The policy changes that would allow more community-based economies to flourish will certainly elicit objections. Some will claim that the promotion of decentralization is "social engineering" involving serious dislocations in the lives of many people. While it is true that some disruption would inevitably accompany a shift toward the local, it would be far less than what is currently resulting from the rush toward globalization and urbanization. It is in fact today's "jobless growth" society that has been buoyed by social and environmental engineering on an unprecedented scale. Vast stretches of the planet and whole societies are being swept up by these same forces and encouraged to abandon their languages, their foods and their architectural styles for a standardized monoculture.

Others will interpret financial incentives for more localized production as "subsidies." But these incentives should be seen as alternatives to current subsidies for globalization — for transport, communications and energy infrastructures, and for education and research and development in the technologies of large-scale production. Moving in the direction of the local will actually cost less than what we are now spending to move towards the global.

These kinds of changes will inevitably require shifts at the personal level as well. They will mean challenging many of the assumptions about "progress" and "development" that many of us were brought up with and that are at the core of Western culture. They will also mean rediscovering the deep psychological benefits of being embedded in community. In the South, the majority of people still get their spiritual, cultural and economic strength from a connection to the place where they live. It is in this respect that the North can learn from the South. For ultimately we are talking about a spiritual awakening that comes from making a connection to other human beings and to the natural world. ■

PURSUING PROGRESS AND LOSING LADAKH

For the last 21 years, Swedish linguist Helena Norberg-Hodge has spent half of each year in Ladakh, working with local people to protect their culture and environment from the effects of rapid modernization. For this work she was awarded the 1986 Right Livelihood Award, also known as the Alternative Nobel Prize. Ms. Hodge is the author of Ancient Futures: Learning From Ladakh *(Sierra Club Books, 1992) and director of the Ladakh Project, which she founded in 1978, and its parent organization, the International Society for Ecology and Culture, in Bristol, UK.*

GENDER AND DEVELOPMENT:

JOHN STACKHOUSE

GLIMPSES FROM NEPAL

In the months preceding the Beijing Women's Conference, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) invited seven leading international journalists to view development activities involving women. Following are their observations from visits to China and Nepal, written exclusively for *Choices*, on the most memorable aspects of their journey. Although they visited both Asian countries, the journalists chose to focus on Nepal. Their reactions were varied, and on occasion critical, as in the first essay, by the lone male in the group.

"In the stampede to prove their gender sensitivity, aid agencies — and a co-opted mass media — have made objects out of women."

JOHN STACKHOUSE

Gender, the motherhood issue of development

We had everything we could want for a good development tour.

There was a rented helicopter, air-conditioned land cruisers, packed lunches and crates of soft drinks carted from the capital.

Most of all, there were lots of women. We had to see lots of women. Our destination was a silk-rearing centre in eastern Nepal, accessible by a day's bumpy drive from Kathmandu, or by an hour helicopter flight over the low Himalayas. We took the latter. The United Nations Development Programme was keen to show its work with women to a group of international journalists. And so, after a good lunch, we met scores of women who, with UNDP assistance, earn a small living making silk.

This business should not be taken lightly. Development agencies are under siege as never before by donor governments who see more failure than success. Dams silt up rivers. Fertilizer plants favour the wealthy. Forestry projects go up only to come down. These are indeed desperate times. But thanks to women, many agencies have found a sure-selling saviour. As a result, just about every development agency in need of money has spent much of 1995 showing the world how much they do for women. Never mind that UNDP has six men in senior management for every woman (and that's good — only four out of 26 other UN agencies fare better); at least they're trying.

The problem is that in the stampede to prove their gender sensitivity, aid agencies — and a co-opted mass media — have made objects out of women. Their feminization of aid has done little more than make women a criterion in the formula of development. You can hear the project evaluation:

"Is there safe water?" Check.

"Are there trees?" Check.

"Is it sustainable?" Of course.

"What about women?" Check.

I realized this a few weeks after my visit to Nepal, when I stood in the sweltering heat of a rice paddy in northern India. I had travelled to Uttar Pradesh, India's most populous state, to see a US$80.2 million project financed by the World

JOHN STACKHOUSE

Bank to rehabilitate salt land. The project seemed a technical success, with small farmers boasting about the thousands of rupees they now earn from land once deemed useless.

Nonetheless, under instruction from the World Bank (ten professional men for every three professional women there), the project was redesigned to target women. In the name of "gender in development," village women were bunched

together to form thrift groups so that one day they, too, might buy land.

It was a noble idea for an outsider, and World Bank publicists no doubt will hold it up as an example of the bank's new commitment to women.

For the project managers, however, the women's element — and it is little more than an element — seemed like a sideshow. When I told one government official I was more interested in seeing the reclaimed fields than a staged women's group meeting, he said, "I am so happy to hear that. You know, we really are technical people. These social activities, these are an add-on."

He stressed that word, "add-on."

A few days later, I stood with another group of men in a thick forest in the Indian state of West Bengal. The men farmers are part of the state's highly successful afforestation scheme, which has won worldwide attention. Under pressure from aid donors, though, the state has redrawn the project in the name of women. The men still protect the forest, harvest its produce and pocket the cash, but they are told now to bring their wives to the project meetings. Some even do.

Why should they think otherwise? Of the 11,000 women in the state forestry service, only two are women.

The cheerleaders of official development assistance will no doubt call this view cynical, and that too has become part of the point. As development agencies find themselves mired in the controversies of structural adjustment and sustainable growth, they have found a no-lose public relations proposition in supporting almost anything in the name of women.

Gender has become the motherhood issue of development, the skirt behind which so many flawed projects can hide. The media can accept much of the blame for this. Like the big development agencies, many of us still see women as the objects of development, rather than the subjects. We see women as the victims of various forces, and then the beneficiaries (oops, the *participants*) of various good works. Sewing machines, tree nurseries, water pumps, silkworms: we have declared these the vaccines for so many modern woes.

I suspect we find it more difficult to write about the underlying forces of society and economy. In Nepal, it is easier for us to see a mulberry plantation than it is to see an economic force sweeping men from their villages, and saddling women to land that legally they cannot own. More than a decade ago, foreign aid donors began to see such structural barriers to economic growth. A new railway, they realized, was of little value if no one paid for a ticket. Fertilizer was of no use to farmers who were paid lousy prices for their crops. And why would anyone construct a hydro dam if the state power board was insolvent?

In gender, though, such paradox is tolerated. Women are enrolled in quaint rural credit schemes, while national banking systems funnel money to men at a loss to the national economy. Women are assigned income-generating activities, when they have long been generating income on their own, only at a value that does not equal their work.

In Kathmandu, our group met various women's organizations fighting for change. Many seemed to be run by [privileged] Pukka women, each with a cause and a frequent flyer card. But one woman, Durga Sob, stood out in my mind. "All these other women are Brahmins," said Sob, president of the Feminist Dalit Organisation.

Sob does not see gender issues as social issues; she sees social issues as gender issues. In her mind, people should not focus on the rampant sale of Nepali girls to Indian brothels unless they realise the girls being sold almost exclusively are [poorer] Dalit girls. But Sob has received little donor attention for her quiet caste war. I suspect she would be better off asking for a few sewing machines.

Her subject, after all, remains the object.

— John Stackhouse, Toronto Globe and Mail, *Toronto*

Sharing space as a troublesome concept

... In Nepal and China gender aspects of development are new phenomena. Both being patriarchal societies, the call for sharing of space between men and women at all levels is a troublesome concept, and more so in practice. Yet with the presence of international agencies and a growing international NGO movement, gender aspects can be kept on the front burner of development.

"The insistence by UN and donor agencies that women are a crucial part of development has helped keep the pressure on governments and NGOs."

ANITA ANAND

◀ Journalists trek to a silk-making project in Ilam.

In many countries of the world, the insistence by UN and donor agencies that women are a crucial part of development at all levels has helped keep the pressure on governments and NGOs to re-think their development planning and practice....

— Anita Anand, Women's Feature Service, New Delhi

A foot in two worlds

It's nine years since I was last in Nepal and the beautiful Kathmandu Valley. I was curious to find out what changes had taken place in the country, particularly for women. Of course, democracy has now been established in what is one of the world's poorest countries, and I found women talking more freely about their rights. But it's still a traditional

"It's still a traditional Hindu kingdom where women defer to men in nearly every aspect of their lives."

TRISH WILLIAMS

"She'll probably get married when she's nine or ten years old."

MARTINE VANDEMEULEBROUCKE

Hindu kingdom where women defer to men in nearly every aspect of their lives.

I gained a glimpse of this on the flight from Delhi. A young Nepali woman, coolly dressed in white trousers and jacket sat next to me; she was returning from a four-month training course in Holland. I learned that she has a degree and a career as a television producer in charge of women's programmes. But as a single woman whose parents are dead, she has to live with her brother and his family. As her story unfolded, I realized the extent to which this seemingly modern young woman was still trapped by the past. Each month she gives her salary to her brother. Because she has no bank account, he provides her with what she needs. Apparently they get on well, and he obviously indulges her. But when in conversation with him she has to sit at a lower level and avoid eye contact.

Her brother will also select the man she will marry, but as she explained, this won't be an easy task. Not only must he have a better degree and job than she does, he must also be a high caste Brahmin like herself. A difficult bill to fit.

A young woman with a foot in two worlds, her only concern at that moment was how her brother would react to her wearing trousers, a form of dress she'd adopted during her stay in the West. He was used to seeing her in a traditional sari....

— Trish Williams, BBC, London

Faces I remember

Children's faces flash by in my memory. The first child is walking barefoot through the streets of Kathmandu. She's dressed in rags, carrying her little sister on her shoulders, and wearing the most beautiful smile in the world. I can see her meeting her mother, who sells mangos on the sidewalk a metre away from a pile of garbage. No doubt the statisticians would consider her just another number in their columns of figures on poverty and women's illiteracy in Nepal. She'll probably get married when she's nine or ten years old. Perhaps she'll die in childbirth, like so many of her friends.

The second girl is more richly dressed. She lacks nothing. There are plenty of people to watch over her — except for her parents. At the age of five, she was taken from her family to become a "living goddess," a doll who is paraded around once every year and manipulated according to the religious predilections of the moment. Here, a little girl is a goddess only because she is not a woman. When she becomes one, she'll fall down from heaven. The little goddess is not entitled to a childhood.

The third is dressed like an English schoolgirl. She lives in Ilam, in a little town that seemed like the end of the world to me. She's come a long way to go to school, with a little notebook under her arm and a ballpoint pen in her pocket. She knows that her name

is not just something that is spoken: it can be written also. She shows me her notebook with pride. Soon she'll be learning English and many other things. As I look at her, I'm as moved as I was by the other two girls. All the colours of hope are in her smile, and I cross my fingers for the realization of that hope.

— Martine Vandemeulebroucke, Le Soir, *Brussels*

Beyond economic gains

At 26, Kamala Lamichhane is becoming one of the new breed of Nepalese woman — assertive, inventive and self-reliant. Married at 14 to a man she says didn't want her, she was raised only to be dutiful. For years, she followed her mother-in-law's orders — tending the family's farm, doing household chores and raising two sons, mostly on her own. Her husband took a job as a cook in faraway Dubai, and for six years she saw him just fleetingly on his brief biannual visits home.

Then last year, she seized a new opportunity. When two women from the local development office knocked on her door and invited her to join a UNDP-financed programme that promotes entrepreneurship among women, she quickly agreed. Her husband had been seriously injured in an automobile accident, leaving her the primary breadwinner. And because so many other women from her village were signing up, she felt encouraged to participate.

The DWET (Developing Women's Entrepreneurship in Tourism) programme she joined teaches business skills to women who live near popular tourist areas and encourages them to launch restaurants, lodges and small stores to supplement their farm incomes. After long days spent nursing her husband in the hospital, Mrs. Lamichhane rushed home each night to attend the DWET training sessions. Over a two-week period, she learned how to keep records, do basic accounting and plan a new business venture. Within a few months, using family savings, she opened a restaurant in her village of Nagarkot, a green hilly town an hour's drive east of Kathmandu, which offers panoramic views of the Himalayas.

"Farming is ordinary, but now I have something to grow," says Mrs. Lamichhane, a thin, dark-eyed woman who grins broadly as she shows off her kitchen, filled with the scent of curry, coriander and other spices, and the adjacent dining room that can accommodate about 20 customers. Beyond economic gains, Mrs. Lamichhane describes a less tangible shift: the way she sees herself. She's not only earning more money — 2,000 to 3,000 rupees a week ($40 to $60) — but gaining new confidence and status within her family. Now, she says, she's found a way to keep her husband, who does much of the restaurant's cooking, at home. And she can call on him to

"Beyond economic gains, Mrs. Lamichhane describes a less tangible shift: the way she sees herself."

CAROL HYMOWITZ

share more of the household and child-care responsibilities.

"He has no way out now," she says. "If I'm really hard pressed he'll see that the children are fed."

— *Carol Hymowitz,* Wall Street Journal, *New York*

Women's work

Ilam. Along the winding, muddy roads, the women in the small silk concern established by Lutheran World Services pass by, wearing necklaces made of dried cocoons. On the lawn of the gardens, the journalists are talking with groups of peasant women. Each woman has chosen an activity suited to her capabilities. The poorest cultivate mulberry bushes and come to deliver the leaves to the farm; some carefully raise the fragile silkworms, while others work by the day or by the month on the weaving aspect of the business.

In the middle of Ilam's main street, sitting on the front steps of a hotel, three young men are playing "the fly game." Each puts a piece of paper on the ground and waits for an insect to alight on it to win — and make a killing. Two women, empty wicker baskets hanging from their backs, walk by laughing. I find myself thinking that the women are working, while the men are killing time....

Laurence Folléa, Le Monde, *Paris*

Flashbacks

The face of a 50-year-old woman, who lives in an eastern village of Nepal. She got married when she was only nine, and has six children. "Nine?" I asked, and she nods with a smile. She wakes up at four, and works all day long. An hour to fetch water, four hours to cook two meals a day. She cleans, she washes, she digs and she has cows and her family to look after.

I also remember the face of a 29-year-old Dalit woman, who has organized the first NGO for Dalit women in Nepal. Dalit, who are regarded as untouchable under the caste hierarchy, represent 16 to 20 per cent of the total national population. "Dalit women are discriminated against, not only by other classes, but by men in the same class. We are the poorest and most oppressed. I decided to found the Feminist Dalit Organization to create awareness and educate Dalit women," she said.

And then, I cannot forget — although I barely saw — the face of a young village woman on a stretcher, carried by four thin men. They had been walking for hours to get to the nearest hospital, which had no facilities to perform even a simple operation.

I do not know what she died of, but perhaps her death would not have occurred had she had access to safe water, or if she had not had to work so hard, or if more attention had been paid to women's health. We lost our voices when the stretcher passed by.... ■

— *Etsuko Ohara,* Asahi Shimbun, *Tokyo*

"The women are working, while the men are killing time."

LAURENCE FOLLÉA

"Dalit women are discriminated against, not only by other classes, but by men in the same class."

ETSUKO OHARA

CITIES ON THE BRINK TRY NEW TACTICS

By Kristin Helmore

For half her life, ten-year-old Bilkish has lived in a hut of black plastic on a sidewalk in central Bombay. It's a small space, about three by four metres, and too low for an adult to stand in. Nine people live there: Bilkish and her five brothers and sisters, her parents and her father's brother. The hut's only opening is the "door," a dirty quilt draped over a rope. There is no other ventilation or source of light, and even in the breezy Bombay winters black plastic makes a hot, dark and airless home.

Every morning at five o'clock, Bilkish and her sisters line up at a communal water-tap several blocks away. After waiting more than an hour, they stagger home with sloshing pails of water on their heads: a day's supply for bathing, washing, cooking, drinking and making tea. There is also a public toilet several blocks away, but using it costs more money than the family can afford.

The family moved to Bombay from a dusty, sleepy village in eastern India five years ago. Bilkish's mother now works as a servant whenever her frail health permits, which is not often. The child's father works as a day-labourer on construction sites, but he suffers from tuberculosis, a common complaint among slum dwellers the world over. His working days are numbered, so to make ends meet, the children are sent out into traffic to beg. Soon Bilkish will start working as a servant. She has never been to school.

This family's situation is multiplied by hundreds of millions in cities throughout the developing world, from Rio de Janeiro to Nairobi to Manila.

Urban crush

A hundred years ago, roughly five per cent of the world's people lived in cities with populations over 100,000. Today, an estimated 45 per cent — about 2.5 billion people — live in urban areas. In recent years, the most explosive growth has been in the developing world, where urban populations have tripled in the last 30 years. Between 1950 and 1995, the number of cities in the developed countries with populations of more than one million doubled, from 49 to 112; in that same period, cities of more than one million people in the Third World increased sixfold, from 34 to 213.

There is little room for more families on the sidewalks and in the slums of such cities, yet they keep coming. There are few jobs to sustain them. The basic infrastructure they require — housing, clean water, waste disposal, electricity, transport — seems beyond the capacities of many cities to provide, yet the families pour in, convinced that the city will offer them a better life.

In terms of sheer numbers, urban concentrations are greatest in Asia, where cities are home to over one billion people, roughly one-third of the region's population. In Africa, urbanization is a relatively recent phenomenon; still, more than a third of the population already lives in cities, and the rates of urban migration are increasing. In Latin America, on the other hand, 74 per cent of the population is already urbanized — a scenario that could very well represent the future for the rest of the developing world.

Yet for many observers it is not the growth of cities that is disturbing, it is the glaring disparities between the lives of the poor and those who

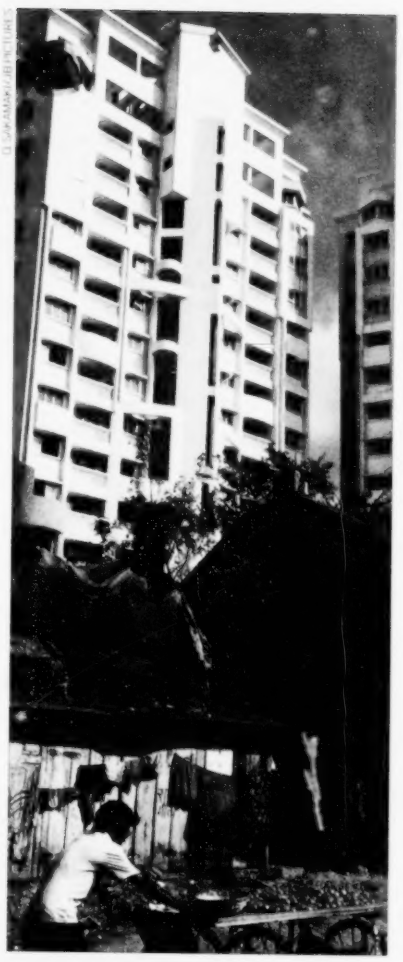
are better off. "These are two different worlds," says Akhtar Badshah, director of programmes at Mega-Cities, a New York-based organization that promotes replicable solutions to urban problems. "The conditions of the poor are getting worse and worse, because governments are simply unable to keep pace with the level of services that is needed. As a result, the ill effects of city life are concentrated among the poor." He cites as an example the appalling environmental conditions in many cities that cause harm to the poor. They lack the luxury of air-conditioners or even the option of closing windows against the miasma of leaded-fuel emissions, smoke and dust that passes for air in many cities. Nor can the poor stay healthy by buying bottled water or maintaining hygienic conditions in their homes.

"The gap is widening dramatically," says Badshah. "For example, the poor are often pushed farther and farther onto the fringes of cities where there is industrial pollution. Yet transport is not keeping pace with the needs, so the poor often take longer and longer to get to work, if they can get there at all, or if they can find work in the first place." Indeed, services in cities today are a problem for all levels of society. But the list of basic services to which the poor have little or no access in the over-stretched cities of the developing world is virtually endless. They suffer disproportionately from lack of basics, such as health care, schools, job opportunities, food, transport, training, adequate housing, security, information and access to the justice system and the rule of law.

Equity, participation, decentralization

These inequities represent not only a moral crisis of staggering portions, but the potential for political chaos and large economic losses. "If cities don't function properly, the productivity of an entire country is negatively affected," says Shabbir Cheema, director of the management, development and governance division at the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), pointing out that cities are the major engines of economic growth in developing countries. "And if the poor are deprived of services, this can have a negative effect on political stability."

The dangers are so acute, in fact, that they are forcing new thinking about the problems of cities, and new approaches



to development in general. More and more development professionals agree that lack of equity is the core problem of urban poverty, and that traditional, hierarchical systems of city management cannot meet the needs of cities today and in the future.

Development planners insist that political decentralization is essential to ensure that those in power are accountable to citizens at every level of society and responsive to their needs. "How do we create cities that work for everybody?" asks Robertson Work, a senior programme officer at UNDP. "It is possible. But it's got to be neighbourhood by neighbourhood, community by community. You can't stand at the top and order change."

Indeed, the very crisis of overcrowding, poverty and environmental decay that is driving cities to the brink of disaster also provides the incentive for those in power to get their house in order, to try new solutions to complex problems and to begin to share responsibility — and decision-making power — with city dwellers themselves.

One of the most innovative aspects of this new approach is the concept that all sectors — even traditional "enemies" such as slum-dwellers and real estate speculators — can, and must, learn to identify common goals and work together to achieve them. Many development strategies today, including those supported by UNDP, take as their starting point the building of partnerships among diverse groups — officials from national and municipal governments, the business community and community-based organizations — to help define problems and bring about solutions. Usually an outside mediator, an "honest broker" trusted by all parties, is needed to establish an atmosphere of collaboration rather than suspicion, and to encourage all parties to put aside traditional rivalries and get on with the task of meeting urban needs.

Juan Manuel Salazar, a UNDP programme officer based in New York, recalls a situation in which just such an approach was taken, with rather dramatic results. In the 1980s, Salazar was an advisor to the mayor of Bogotá, Colombia, a city of seven million people, more than one million of them slum-dwellers living in extreme poverty. He explains that in the area of urban development and poverty alleviation, bureaucrats and planners at all levels felt a profound sense of frustration. The city administration, he says, was blocked from being responsive to the concrete needs of the people by bureaucratic traditions and abstract, theoretical thinking. Yet the necessary resources were there — in the private sector as well as in the public coffers — if only they could be harnessed to accomplish specific, concrete goals.

With UNDP support, the mayor of Bogotá convened work sessions among city officials, the business community, voluntary organizations and mothers from slum areas, who were responsible for the welfare — often the very survival — of their families. To further promote a sense of trust, UNDP suggested the mayor draw up a "social contract" with the people, signed by all parties, and committing both public and private institutions to take specific steps to respond to the needs of the people. "There used to be a theory that you join

The dangers are so acute that they are forcing new thinking about the problems of cities.

◀ **Bogotá, Colombia (far left). Luxury high-rise overshadows shantytown in Bombay, India (left).**

▶ **Cali, Colombia, where decentralized elections paved the way for a wide range of social programmes (top). The urban poor in Cali (right), and Calcutta, India (far right).**

the highest person from the community with the lowest person in the administration," says Salazar, "but that's a mistake. Our strategy was to link people from the lowest level in the community with the highest level of authority."

"The most felt need was for child care," he says, because when women went out to work, often children were left home alone. "That was the hook that started the whole thing," he adds. Although there were many non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and private businesses ready to participate in providing child care, the perception was that buildings to accommodate the children had to be constructed first, and that this would take two years. So UNDP procured a number of military tents from Israel to be used on a temporary basis. At the same time, it called on 50 mothers from the community to come for training, and engaged the services of public institutions to train the mothers and provide equipment for the centres. A foundation donated tables and chairs. The day-care centres — a network of tents, each sheltering 50 children — were functioning within one week. One year later, in half the time anticipated, the children moved from the tents into new buildings.

"The buildings were constructed through this same participatory process," says Salazar. "Eventually this became a national programme serving hundreds of thousands of children."

The need had existed for years before, and many promises had been made,

TIMOTHY ROSS/JB PICTURES

but nothing had been accomplished under the old hierarchical system, in which bureaucracy and political maneuvering had made collaboration impossible. To be effective, says UNDP's Robertson Work, urban management must be "a self-organizing system, where everyone is responsible, everyone is a player."

Latin America: lessons for the future

EDUARDO MARQUEZ/PANOS PICTURES

In Latin America, the highest level of urbanization in the developing world has brought with it a host of social ills: one in three households in the region is run by a single parent; homicide rates are the highest in the world; street children are more prevalent than everywhere else; and alcoholism, drug abuse and domestic violence are part of everyday life. By the year 2000, experts predict that 90 per cent of Latin America's poor will be living in cities and towns. Yet if Latin America represents a sinister future for other rapidly-urbanizing regions, it also holds out some striking examples of how urban problems can be solved.

Throughout this region, governments, with support from UNDP, have been active in promoting decentralization, with notable successes in Bolivia, Chile, Colombia and Venezuela. Particularly in Colombia, instances of participatory urban management are beginning to proliferate. When a new constitution was adopted in that country in 1991, it brought a radical change to the relationship between the average citizen and public officials. At the time, Rodrigo Guerrero was a physician in Cali (pop. two million) and the director of an NGO working in public health. Because of his standing in the community, he was persuaded to run for mayor in Cali's first decentralized election — a radical change from the old system in which mayors were appointed by a state governor, who was appointed by the president.

"In the past," says Guerrero, "there was no sense of accountability to the citizens." A mayor's loyalty was not to the local community for whose welfare he was responsible, but to the state governor and the political party that supported his nomination. "But when you are elected, you are directly accountable and responsible to those who vote for you. Previously the mayors could do anything they wanted as long as they were in accord with the governor."

During his campaign for office in the neighbourhoods of Cali in 1992, Guerrero heard the same overwhelming concern voiced again and again. Violent crime was unanimously cited as Cali's biggest problem, and security was the main preoccupation of its people, rich and poor. Vowing to tackle the problem, Guerrero was elected, only to discover that the old system of city management had not left him much to work with.

In the first place, he says, there was no coordination or collaboration among institutions responsible for public safety. "We didn't even know how many killings there were, let alone where and when they were taking place," the former mayor recalls. (Guerrero chose to return to work in public health after one three-year term.) "Data from the police were in conflict with data from the judicial system, and with data from the public health sector."

To encourage collaboration rather than rivalry and distrust, he assembled a research group consisting of epidemiologists, experts in forensic medicine, members of the police, the judiciary, the public health system and human rights organizations. These new partners met weekly to analyse the city's crime statistics, and in a matter of months came up with reliable data on which to base a crime-prevention programme. "We came to the conclusion that the great majority of the killings were not due to the drug trade, but to the social disintegration that was going on in the city," he says.

Colombia's massive drug trade, however, does play a part. Guerrero likens the drug industry in his country to the AIDS virus in the human body. As AIDS destroys an organism's immune system, so have drug money and the drug culture of violence severely weakened Colombia's principal organs of defense against crime: the police and the judiciary. And the centralized nature of these institutions has facilitated the spread of the drug "virus" — throughout Colombian society.

As the mayor of one city, Guerrero could not solve the problems of violence as a whole. But the steps he took in Cali have made a difference, and many of them are being replicated in other parts of the country. "In Cali we began a systematic effort to improve the police and the judicial system," he says. First, he raised the educational requirements for police recruits, who must now have a high school diploma. He offered policemen additional training and courses in human rights and the provisions of the new constitution. To discourage police corruption, he enabled patrolmen and officers to benefit from housing schemes funded through partnerships between the private sector and the municipality. "In the past, if policemen wanted to be honest, they could not afford a decent house," he explains. "Or they could live in a very nice house, paid for by drug lords."

But the most important facet of his anti-crime programme was its emphasis on community participation through "public safety councils" in which neighbourhood people meet regularly with the local authorities to discuss local solutions to the problems of violent crime. "Personal contact and exchange of information between ordinary citizens and the authorities, as well as collaboration among various government institutions — this is the most effective way to control violent crime," he says.

Urban management must be "a self-organizing system, where everyone is responsible, everyone is a player."

In order to address the problems of poverty and social disintegration that are at the root of urban violence, Guerrero set up a job-training programme for street children and established a highly successful technical skills programme for micro-entrepreneurs with a grant from UNDP. He also launched the largest housing project ever completed in Latin America: the construction of 30,000 new homes by low-income families for their own use — the equivalent of a new city of 150,000 people. He added 40,000 new places for children at the grammar school level, raising Cali's coverage of primary education to 100 per cent.

Crime prevention measures include restrictions on the sale of alcohol and firearms, which were previously controlled by the federal government. Police stations were remodeled and their work computerized to better serve the local population, and courthouse records were updated. As a result, an antiquated, bloated system that previously served no one now functions. He set up local "houses of peace" where civic institutions such as the police and human rights groups respond to complaints from citizens. He opened family units where trained counselors help resolve family disputes, and mediation centres where law students help people solve problems without resorting to violence. And to ensure that the municipal government remains responsive and accountable to the citizens, the mayor and his cabinet visited neighbourhood centres on a weekly basis to discuss local issues informally with ordinary citizens.

The results of all these efforts speak for themselves. Homicide rates in Cali have decreased by ten per cent in absolute numbers. Whereas in the past only two per cent of all perpetrators of violent crimes were identified, the rate is now 20 per cent. Guerrero's successor as mayor has continued the programme, and crime rates are still dropping. The new sense of collaboration and trust between the citizens of Cali and their elected officials is bearing fruit in more effective urban management and in greater political stability as well.

In Cali, it was decentralized elections that opened the way for increased participation at all levels of city management. Yet Guerrero is quick to point out that elections alone are not a panacea for ensuring accountability on the part of public officials. He says that a strengthening of "civil society" — networks of grassroots organizations through which people can solve urban problems at the local level — is needed to promote equity and ensure accountability in urban management. "It's the organization of civil society that puts pressure on politicians to perform," he says. "When people start working in community organizations they discover that they can have an influence and cause change. This is the essence of a democratic society."

CITIES ON THE BRINK TRY NEW TACTICS

The experience of Cali is not unique. It is one of hundreds, perhaps thousands of examples from around the world of local people who are finding innovative, dynamic, equitable solutions to severe, sometimes devastating urban problems. The solutions may start small, but their impact on individual lives can be immense. (Even Bilkish in her black plastic hut in Bombay has begun attending classes at a local community centre, and is learning to read and write.)

Initiatives for change are as diverse as the cities that are spawning them, yet they all point to a global trend toward equity, participation and democracy. Increasingly it is recognized that the role of outsiders, including international organizations, is not to impose solutions. Rather it is to promote dialogue and cooperation and to bring to the attention of local actors a menu of examples of success from which they can shape their own, home-grown strategies for renewal. One positive change, says Mega Cities' Akhtar Badshah, is that development thinkers are beginning to turn away from the old paradigm of studying problems, to studying solutions instead. "Traditional research tries to figure out what is not working and what the problems are," he says. "Instead, we need to look at what is working — to value strengths, to envision what might be." ■

MARK EDWARDS/STILL PICTURES

Kristin Helmore is a freelance writer based in the US, who has received numerous awards for development journalism. She is a former Third World correspondent for the Christian Science Monitor *and editor in chief of* African Farmer *magazine.*

By David Hecht

HOW TO BUILD A MILLION HOMES. AND THAT'S THE EASY PART.

A quarter of South Africa's black population is homeless. Yet in spite of an ambitious government housing programme, new construction is slow, in part because attitudes have failed to keep pace with sweeping changes in political leadership.

Cape Town, South Africa — "I was 11 when the bulldozers came," says Yasmine Jacobs, who was born in a part of Cape Town known as District Six, a poor but integrated community that was demolished by the apartheid government in the 1960s. "It was far from perfect," she says, "but it was a community." Hindu, Muslim, Jew, Catholic, Protestant, dark-skin, light-skin, all found a way to get on. "We shared each other's holidays, we didn't lock our doors," she says.

With the infamous Group Areas Act, the apartheid government dismantled racially mixed districts in cities and towns throughout South Africa, and millions of people were forcibly removed. The so-called "coloureds" in District Six had to go to the outskirts of Cape Town, in the various shantytowns of Cape Flats, according to their racial category. As Malay Muslims, Yasmine's family was moved to Mitchell's Plain. "We felt alienated," she says, "and life was never the same again."

Today the policy of apartheid has ended. Yet despite the new Government of National Unity's best intentions, the wheels of change are slow to turn. Officially all South Africans can now move freely throughout the country. Yet with rampant crime and violence, the rich increasingly huddle together in what is called "cluster housing," surrounded by electric fences and heavily armed guards. As for the poor, many live in "no-go zones," where even the police are afraid to enter.

Hope binds the new South Africa, but fear is pervasive. Blacks and coloureds, long forced to live in overpopulated, crime-ridden townships, are now taking things into their own hands, invading public and private land. More than seven million people, or a quarter of the black population of South Africa, are currently homeless, living without electricity, sanitation or water, in spontaneous shack settlements or just sleeping in the open. These informal communities have their own system of justice, says one inhabitant from a squatter settlement that suddenly sprang up last year in Moffat Park, a formerly all-white suburb of Johannesburg, and they will "fight to the death" to stay where they are.

The dilemma for the new government is that, while the forced removals that occurred in places such as District Six must never happen again, people, no matter how deprived, cannot be allowed to commandeer land that does not belong to them. The government's ambitious solution is to secure "shelter and tenure for all South Africans," and promised one million new and legal homes within the first five years of its administration. The plan was masterminded by the much respected anti-apartheid warrior, Joe Slovo, the new government's first housing minister who died a year after taking office.

Although the plan, like much of the government's Reconstruction and Development Programme, has received criticism in some quarters — mostly for having an unrealistic time frame — it is generally seen as being on the right track. In an effort to stimulate private sector initiative, the government has, for instance, resisted pressure to fully subsidize housing. Instead, it gives partial grants and includes a guarantee scheme to help banks overcome their reluctance to lend to the poor. In June 1995, the banks agreed to a new lending mechanism for low-income housing, although with higher interest rates and over a shorter period than for the higher-income market.

Even so, 70 per cent of the people in need of housing earn too little to qualify. As subsidies alone are not enough to build anything resembling a home, the way forward, according to President Nelson Mandela, is "to harness the energy of the people." He has directed government support toward various community-based schemes by which the poor can pool their resources, utilize their own labour and even make their own bricks. Self-esteem, the president said recently, is key to the construction of a new South Africa.

But almost two years after South Africa's new government took office, the construction of new homes has fallen far short of expectations. With the backlog accumulated during the apartheid years, along with population growth, an estimated 1.6 million new homes are now urgently needed, and that number is expected to grow by 200,000 each year. "When is the drafting of policies going to end and the delivery of houses to the people start?" demanded one frustrated caller on a Soweto radio station.

The delays, furthermore, are not just in housing. Most of the government's Reconstruction and Development Programme to remedy the various "apartheid distortions" is behind schedule. And it is not because of a shortage of funds.

Part of the problem is that many of the administrative structures needed to carry out the programme, whether at the national or local levels, are simply not in place, while those that are lack staff with the necessary skills and experience.

To help move the programme along, the government has been calling on the international community, not so much for financial assistance but to support capacity-building efforts and to bring to South Africa the experience of other countries facing similar problems. In response, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) is providing technical assistance valued at US$2.4 million over the next three years. And since May of last year, UNDP, through the UN Centre for Human Settlements, has seconded one of its housing experts, Lalith Lankatilleke, to South Africa's housing ministry.

PAUL WEINBERG/PANOS PICTURES

Thatching the roof of a traditional-style home in Natal Province. ▲

Supporting the people's process

In Lankatilleke's view, the priority is to ensure that the housing subsidies flow directly to the people needing the houses. To do this, the Department of Housing is setting up a People's Housing Partnership. Though initiated by the government, the Partnership is designed to bypass bureaucratic constraints and respond directly to people's needs. At the same time, UNDP is beginning to train and advise provincial and local administrations, through which housing subsidies are channeled.

In reality, however, the building of homes may be the easy part. Another big problem is deciding where the houses will be built. For private developers, the most obvious solution is simply to extend the overcrowded black townships such as Soweto, Khayelitsha or Alexandra. In some cases, this has already begun. But that makes little sense in a South Africa that wants to end segregation.

To undo the legacy of apartheid requires a "new geography," says Beet van de Rooyen, chief director of the housing ministry. "The problem with our cities is that they are divided in two." To create a workable division of labour and greater efficiency, "we've got to make them grow towards each other," he says.

In Lankatilleke's view, it is a problem that will require more than expert planning. He emphasizes that professionals should try rather to "participate in what people are doing for themselves."

For starters, the government must "empower the poor," says Lankatilleke. He points out that housing subsidies have tended to go to private developers or organizers of community-based schemes, which are not necessarily as participatory as their name would imply. What is needed is to "support the people's process," he declares, and to establish mechanisms at all levels by which this can be accomplished.

That people have not been given responsibility for their own development partly explains why the old nationwide campaign of rent strikes and boycotts organized to cripple the apartheid regime largely continues. Repayment rates on mortgages and rentals are still low in most black and coloured communities, despite a government campaign to change perceptions called "Masakhane," or "build together now."

As UNDP's resident representative and UN coordinator for South Africa, David Whaley, sees it, South Africa's "distortions result not only from apartheid, but also from resistance to it." Half the battle is to create bureaucracies that really serve people. The other half, he says, is to help people to make the switch from "past struggles to future development." ■

David Hecht is a regular contributor to Africa Recovery. *He is co-author of* Invisible Governance: The Art of African Micropolitics *(New York: Autonomedia, 1994).*

NOTEBOOK

ANDREA BOOHER/UNDP

GREEN CITIES

Some of the best ideas can be found right in your own backyard. At least that's what Jac Smit discovered in the early 1980s when he was consulting on an agricultural project in Tanzania.

What Smit noticed was how families in Dar-es-Salaam were growing vegetables and raising animals near their homes and in the vacant lots around the city, thereby improving family nutrition and earning extra cash. Thinking the idea might benefit other city dwellers, Smit conducted a survey of farming in nearby urban centres. What he unearthed radically changed the direction of his research: rather than compiling a "how-to" manual on urban farming, he decided to report on what was *already happening.*

Since that time, Smit has been gathering documentation on a practice he claims is "overlooked, underestimated and underreported," ranging from market gardens to indoor cultivation of ornamental plants to raising fish in freshwater lagoons to rooftop "hydroponics." With funding from the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), Smit and his team at the Urban Agriculture Network visited 100 cities and towns in 30 countries, collecting information on a topic that many city officials and urban planners would like to pretend doesn't exist.

"Urban agriculture has been swept aside because of an outdated planning concept of the industrial city and agricultural countryside," he says. "But cities in the real world are not developing according to these divisions of labour. Urban agriculture is moving ahead, and to some extent we have to catch up with it."

The results of their research, compiled in a new book published by UNDP called *Urban Agriculture: Food, Jobs and Sustainable Cities,* are surprising: They reveal, for example, that about 15 per cent of the world's food supply is produced by 800 million urban farmers worldwide. And because as much as 90 cent of a poor family's income can go toward food, urban farming is helping millions of people escape from extreme poverty.

Urban agriculture is also creating jobs and helping clean the environment. In Calcutta, more than 20,000 people have found jobs farming the richly composted land of old dump sites. In Shanghai in 1991, the Bureau of Environmental Sanitation was collecting 90 per cent of the city's human waste (8,000 tonnes) each day, treating it, and selling it as fertilizer to farmers in the metropolitan area.

The United Nations serves all the world's nations and peoples. But its ability to carry out its work is being hampered by financial problems. Member States' overdue payments to the organization totalled US$2.9 billion as of 1 April. As a result, the United Nations could be completely insolvent by the end of the year.*

There are obvious health risks associated with urban farming, including contamination of food by heavy metals, such as lead from automobile emissions. But Smit maintains that proper research, city planning and extension services could help eliminate these hazards and make urban agriculture safer and more productive.

Urban Agriculture: Food, Jobs and Sustainable Cities is available in English for the price of shipping and handling. Contact the Urban Agriculture Network, 1711 Lamont Street, NW, Washington, DC 20010, USA; tel: (202) 483-8130, fax: (202) 986-6732, E-mail: 72144.3446@compuserve.com. ■

— Lois Jensen

About 54,000 people work in the entire UN system worldwide, including the headquarters in New York and 25 organizations, such as UNICEF, the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and the United Nations Development Programme. That's about the same number of people who work for Disney World and Disneyland or only about one-third the number of people who work at McDonald's restaurants.*

LEGENDARY CITIES

"Everything I have heard about the beauty of Samarkand is true — except that it is even more beautiful than I could have imagined," wrote Alexander the Great more than 2,000 years ago, about this fabled city along the ancient Silk Route.

But today, Samarkand has begun to fall the way of urban centres elsewhere around the globe, complete with crumbling infrastructure, overcrowding, air pollution and a myriad of other environmental problems.

Despite preservation efforts carried out for generations, mostly by local experts, Samarkand's great mosques, *caravanserai,* ancient monuments and historic public spaces are decaying, threatening to deprive modern-day Uzbekistan of its rich cultural heritage and an important source of tourism revenue.

Samarkand may never return to the prominence it knew when traders were carrying prized silks, spices and porcelain from China to Europe a dozen centuries ago, but some of its richness will hopefully be preserved through a project spearheaded by UNDP, in partnership with UNESCO.

"The extent and scale of the work needed to revive Silk Route cities like Samarkand are formidable," says Sylvio Mutal, a former UNDP programme manager now consulting on historic preservation in Uzbekistan and other countries. And the challenge ahead involves more than simply giving old buildings a facelift, he warns. ▶

FRANCOIS CHARTON/BLACK STAR

▶ **Farming vacant lots on the outskirts of Nairobi, Kenya (top). Historic monuments in Samarkand, as well as surrounding neighbourhoods, are targeted for restoration (right).**

*** Source: UN Department of Public Information, April 1996**

LEGENDARY, *continued*

Studies financed by UNDP over the past two years have found that saving important monuments in Samarkand — as well as in the Silk Route cities of Bukhara, Khiva and Kokand — will only succeed in the long run if other actions are taken at the same time. For example, attempts to restore important buildings would be futile without first solving the city's drainage problem, which causes water and salt to eat away at the structures' foundations.

"The goal is not only to ensure that mosques and historic monuments survive, but that entire cities survive," says Mutal. Monuments will only "live" when the urban areas around them are economically stable, environmentally balanced and socially vital.

"Our work in these cities must be a human development programme of which urban heritage is one part," he says, adding that such an approach is also more likely to attract support from outside donors. "This is how I see it. If a mosque collapses in an earthquake,I don't say we should rebuild only the mosque. I say we should rebuild the entire neighbourhood and bring the mosque to its original splendour."

Khalid Malik, UNDP's resident representative in Uzbekistan, agrees. "Few international efforts have focused on the revival of culture in its broad sense. Typically, they relate to a single city or even a collection of monuments," he said at a conference in February aimed at devising a long-term plan for cultural development and revival in that country. ■

— Richard Kollodge

VIOLENCE-FREE CITIES

"The problem of violence against women is too often ignored or marginalized," says Tessie Fernandez, director of Lihok Pilipina, a women's organization based in Cebu City, Philippines."If communities truly want to be safe and peaceful then we need to address the lack of safety in our homes and families — the most basic unit of any society."

In the 1980s, Lihok Pilipina commissioned a city-wide survey that revealed startling statistics: six out of ten women in Cebu City were battered; 50 per cent of sexual assaults against women and children were committed by male family members.

In response, Lihok has established a network of anti-domestic-violence watch groups, called Bantay Bana, made up of volunteers from local communities. These groups are located in 17 of the poorest neighbourhoods in and around Cebu City; seven more neighbourhoods will soon have them too. Watch group members help battered women get emergency medical care, police protection, shelter and legal assistance.

Cebu City officials have also helped out by providing space in public buildings for each Bantay Bana. Local hospitals offer free checkups and medical referrals. Staff at police stations, schools and other community agencies have undergone gender sensitivity training. And the city is funding the construction of a women's crisis centre.

Other cities in the region will benefit from Cebu City's success, thanks to a Violence-Free Cities Project sponsored by UNDP and the Asia Pacific Forum for Women, Law and Development, with funding from the Dutch government.

According to UNDP's Susanna George, cities that participate in the project will first gather data on violence against women, particularly in the poorest communities, then build partnerships among city officials and non-governmental organizations to tackle the problem. Dhaka, Bangladesh, has been selected as the site of the first project.

A video featuring the work of Lihok Pilipina will debut in June at Habitat II. For more information, contact Susanna George in Malaysia by fax: (60-3) 253-2361or E-mail: susanna@um.pap.po.my. ■

—Dianne Sherman

To launch the International Year for the Eradication of Poverty, UNDP Administrator James Gustave Speth turned on the "Poverty Clock" at UN headquarters in New York in January. The year coincides with a major push on the part of UNDP to make poverty eradication "job number 1." Despite a few starts and stops, the clock keeps ticking, registering the number of people added each second to the ranks of the world's poor — those living on less than US$1 a day. From 17 January to 1 May, when this publication went to press, the number totalled 7,106,400, or 67,680 people a day. (*Since you asked, yes, *the clock did stop ticking for an extended period in March and April. No, poverty was not halted.)* ■

For every dollar that the USA contributed to the New York-based UNDP in 1995, American companies got back more than US$2 in procurement orders.*

ANOTHER AFRICA INITIATIVE?

The United Nations launched its "Initiative for Africa" on 15 March. In a feat of technical wizardry, UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali in Geneva was linked up by satellite to the Prime Minister of Ethiopia and OAU Chairman Meles Zenawi in Addis Ababa, with UNDP Administrator James Gustave Speth, World Bank President James Wolfenson and heads of other UN agencies anchoring in New York.

The total cost of all UN peacekeeping work in 1995 — in the former Yugoslavia and 13 other places— was $3 billion. This is less than the combined budgets of New York City's Police, Fire and Corrections Departments. It is equivalent to a mere 1.1 per cent of the US military budget and less than 0.3 per cent of worldwide military spending.*

For the many hundreds of invited guests who gathered at the UN, the event's nearly flawless execution was a good omen for Africa — notwithstanding the Ides of March.

To alter the prospects for Africa, however, will require more than good luck or technical prowess. In a preface to the Initiative's main document, the Secretary-General reminds the world of the challenges ahead: "At a time when conditions are steadily improving for many peoples around the world, the socio-economic plight of Africa remains a matter of grave concern. Today, over 220 million Africans live in conditions of absolute poverty, and Africa is the only region in the world where poverty is expected to increase during this decade."

During the next ten years, the Initiative, led by the World Bank, will help mobilize up to US$25 billion to accelerate Africa's development in the areas of health, education, water and food security, peace and governance. This means that existing resources will be reallocated from national budgets, with small amounts of new money from the donor community and the Bretton Woods institutions.

To many Africans and Africanists familiar with previous attempts at "saving" the continent, the Initiative evoked a feeling of *deja vu* — and with good reason. In ▶

continued page 26

the recent past, the UN has been involved in a veritable alphabet soup of initiatives: the 1986-90 UNPAAERD (the UN Programme of Action for African Economic Recovery and Development) and its successor, UNNADAF (the UN New Agenda for the Development of Africa in the 1990s), along with the System-wide Plan of Action for African Recovery and Development.

The most important difference between previous initiatives and the present one is that there is an active financial component integral to the new plan, with the Bretton Woods institutions committed to raising up to 80 per cent of the targeted amount. This UN-World Bank collaboration is historic and unprecedented, and for Africa, even more so.

Given Africa's financial problems, and the benign neglect the continent has suffered, especially over the last two decades, the amount of money to be raised is modest. It comes to about $4 a year for each of the region's 600 million residents. When population growth is factored in, that amount drops to only $2.50 per person.

But numbers tell only part of the story. Africa's problems, as has often been pointed out, are not strictly "poverty" in the narrow sense of the word. Rather, they have to do with a paucity of political will and economic judgement needed to maximize the continent's resources.

The special expertise that UNDP is bringing to Africa is in the area of governance, with emphasis on conflict prevention, democratization and strengthening of Africa's public management and civil society. As of January 1996, the organization was supporting close to 100 related projects, in 37 African countries. One example of the organization's work in this area was a March workshop in Bujumbura, Burundi, where it brought the national government and members of parliament together with 13 parliamentarians from other countries in Africa, Europe and Haiti. UNDP was able to play a crucial mediating role among the country's various political and ethnic factions, whose internecine fighting has raised fears of another conflict like the one in Rwanda.

In all areas of its engagement, the Initiative will require the active support of African governments. And as demonstrated by the Burundi example, the prevailing sentiment is that the answer to Africa's problems necessarily lies with Africans themselves, with a little help from their friends. ■

— Tunji Lardner

This painting, by Dalė Krukonytė, age six, from Lithuania, was one of the award winners in an art competition sponsored by UNDP in Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States, on the theme of people and their relationship to the environment. The artwork, along with other winning paintings, will be on view at Habitat II.

PIG POWER

DANIELLE HAYES/UNDP

Havana — At a research institute in the suburbs of Cuba's capital, pigs are pampered with meals prepared by the city's finest chefs. No, this isn't a medical experiment — or a backstage moment with the porcine starlets of *Babe*. It's part of a biodynamic system that cleans up the environment, recycles urban waste, promotes sustainable agriculture and produces fuel for power.

The magic ingredient is pig manure, which, after a natural process of fermentation, turns into a rich fertilizer and enough natural gas to fire up stoves in neighbouring homes and the Pig Research Institute's central kitchen. In fact, the by-products are so potent that the institute's six hectares of land has potential annual yields of 16 tonnes of pork, 20 tonnes of fish, 40 tonnes of rice, three tonnes of duck meat, 14,000 quarts of milk, 70,000 eggs, a half a tonne of honey, and oranges, lemons and grapefruits from 14,000 trees.

Key to the entire system is feeding the pigs a healthy diet at low cost. "Pigs are usually fed with grain," says Miguel Perez Valdivia, mastermind of the Nonconventional Feeding of Pigs Project, which was launched five years ago with support from UNDP. "But since Cuba has no grain, and it costs US$300 a tonne to import, we had to find other means."

Pigs may be highly intelligent, but they are not fussy eaters. Accordingly, Valdivia arranges daily pick-ups of refuse from Havana's largest restaurants, slaughterhouses and fish processing plants, grinds it altogether and cooks it to 120 degrees Centigrade in a device he created called the thermal destructor. The result: a hearty meal for pigs that costs far less than a grain-only diet — only $19 a tonne. The institute's pigs will reach 100 kilos in six months, the same as grain-fed pigs but at a savings of $150 a day.

The budget for the UN's core functions—the Secretariat's operations in New York, Geneva, Nairobi, Vienna and five regional commissions—amounts to US$1.3 billion a year. This is equal to only about 4 per cent of New York City's annual budget or slightly more than half of the yearly budget for Tokyo's Fire Department.*

The system works like this: each day pig manure is collected in a tank or long plastic tube known as a biogas digester. As the material decomposes, harmful bacteria are eliminated and an odourless liquid, solid and gas are produced.

The liquid is fed into ponds where high-protein algae is grown. The algae is part of the pig formula as well as a food for ducks and four species of fish. The solid matter is used to feed worms, which in turn are fed to hens. It is also used as an organic fertilizer for thousands of fruit trees, a vegetable garden and two yearly crops of rice. The methane gas is funneled into the institute's and neighbourhood kitchens.

Biogas digesters are also being tested out in rural areas. In one household outside Havana, "bio-digested" waste from three cows is providing fuel for the family's stove and an abundance of fertilizer. In 1996 alone, the institute is set to build 300 similar systems in isolated farming communities throughout the country.

The idea is catching on. The deluxe system — thermal destructor plus biogas digester — has already been sold to a pig farm in Mazatlan, Mexico, and the Brazilian city of Porto Alegre is bidding on three more.

Lunch anyone? ■

— Danielle Hayes

THE FORGOTTEN WAR IN LAOS

Xieng Khouang Province — More than twenty years have passed since the war in Viet Nam ended, but for neighbouring Lao People's Democratic Republic, the legacy of that conflict is still painfully real. In Phonsavanh Hospital in Laos' Xieng Khouang Province, the body of Lua, a 28-year-old farmer, is riddled with tiny black holes made from hundreds of ball bearings that exploded when he was hoeing his field. Across the hall lies nine-year-old Thao Khnonkham. He was playing and touched a "bombie" that exploded like a shotgun blast into his stomach. Roughly a million cluster bombs were dropped on Laos by United States war planes during and after the Viet Nam war. Each contained some six hundred bomblets, or bombies as they are called, many of which never exploded and are still causing injury.

Bombies and other unexploded ordnance (UXO) have been found just about everywhere in Xieng Khouang Province, including schools, roads, homes, farmland, watering holes, irrigation trenches, temples and trees. "Sometimes bombies go off at the slightest touch, sometimes they can be touched or moved two or three times before they detonate, says Ben Lark, director of the Mines Advisory Group (MAG), a UK-based humanitarian organization that has been conducting bomb-clearing operations and community awareness campaigns in Laos for the last year and a half.

ROBERT SEMENIUK/UNDP

Technicians detonate unexploded bombs in Laos.

Surveys conducted by MAG in Xieng Khouang Province estimate that about a hundred people a year are killed or maimed here, half of them children. "The bomblets were designed to explode on or shortly after impact, but 10 to 30 per cent of them didn't," says Ian Mansfield, an adviser to the Lao UXO Programme. Fifty thousand hectares of agricultural land in Xieng Khouang Province are regarded as unusable because of UXOs. And 12 of Laos' 17 provinces are also littered with unexploded ordnance, according to Mansfield. A recently commissioned survey will help to determine the extent of the problem nationwide and serve as a planning tool for future activities.

The bomb-clearing initiative was given a major boost in August 1995, when the Lao government approved a Special Trust Fund to clear UXOs throughout the country. UNDP, which has been behind the initiative from the start, contributed US$400,000 in seed money. Along with UNICEF, the organization is charged with raising funds and helping the government design a national plan to tackle UXOs. Since then, Australia, the European Union, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway and the United Kingdom have pledged cash contributions totalling $2.5 million; Germany and Sweden have also expressed an interest. In addition, a $2.7 million "in kind" donation from the United States is providing equipment and military personnel to train Laotians in bomb-clearance and community awareness techniques.

Jan Mattsson, UNDP's resident representative in Laos, decries the fact that "there are still innocent victims in Laos, half of them born since the war ended two decades ago." He also says that clearing UXOs in Laos is crucial to the fight against poverty, because it will open up productive land. "Half of all Laotians live below the poverty line," he adds, "and nearly 50 per cent of the children suffer from stunted growth due to malnutrition." ■

—Robert Semeniuk

Four-fifths of the UN's work is devoted to helping developing countries help themselves. This includes saving children from starvation and disease, providing relief to refugees and victims of disaster, protecting human rights, building democracies, countering global crime and illegal drugs, and assisting countries devastated by war.*

NEWSMAKER

A diploma and a gold medal. For most, this would be prize enough. But for Ercan Murat, UNDP resident representative in Kyrgyzstan, this is only the beginning of his reward for being named the country's Man of the Year. He will also walk away from an upcoming awards ceremony with a Kyrgyz national costume, a trained falcon and a horse fully equipped for riding.

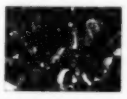
Each year, a committee of writers, artists and academics awards the title to an individual who makes an outstanding contribution to economic and social progress. Kyrgyzstan's president, Askar Akaev, said in a letter that Murat was selected because of a "noble mission fulfilled by UNDP...." ■ *—R.K.*

The UN—including UNICEF, UNDP, the UN Population Fund and the World Food Programme—have about US$4.6 billion a year to spend on economic and social development. That amounts to 80 cents per person worldwide. The world's governments, meanwhile, devote about $770 billion a year (as of 1994) to military spending. That amounts to about $134 per person worldwide.*

UNDP/GENEVA

UNDP Administrator James Gustave Speth greeted schoolchildren in a camp for displaced persons in Liberia in January, before new outbreaks of fighting dampened peace prospects in that country. An estimated 150,000 Liberians have been killed during a lengthy civil war there, and more than half of the country's 2.4 million people have been forced to leave their homes. Speth's visit to Liberia was part of an eight-day trip to West Africa that included stops in Sierra Leone, Guinea and Burkina Faso. Speth met with top officials from each country and visited UNDP-supported projects aimed at responding to emergencies, eradicating poverty and bringing development opportunities to rural areas.

MATTERS OF FACT

Health & Wealth. The average Japanese lives **79.5** years, longer than the typical citizen of any other nation. Average **life expectancy** in Sierra Leone is 39 years.  Between 1960 and 1992, average life expectancy in developing countries increased from **46 to 63 years.** › The **suicide** rate is more than three times higher for **men** than **women** in industrialized countries. There are about 175 million **malnourished** children under the age of five in the developing world. That's more than the entire population of Russia. More than half the population in 45 "least developed countries" lacks access to safe drinking **water.** › There is only one **doctor** for every 18,650 people in least developed countries. In Italy, there is one doctor for every 211 people. › Trained **health workers** are absent in three out of every four **births** in the least developed countries. An African woman is 180 times more likely to die from complications during **pregnancy** than a Western European woman. › In some African countries, the chances that a woman will not **survive** her reproductive years are one in six. Fewer **health bills** (61%) are paid for by **public insurance** in the United States than in any other rich nation. More than 90% are paid for with **public funds** in Germany, Iceland, Luxembourg, Sweden, Switzerland and the United Kingdom.

Information is drawn from the 1995 *Human Development Report*, commissioned by the United Nations Development Programme. The report is published in English by Oxford University Press (paperback ISBN 0-19-510023-9; hardbound 0-19-510022-0), and in ten other language editions by a variety of publishers.